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SUBJECT: RADAR BREAKDOWN RAISES FINANCIAL AND SAFETY
CONCERNS

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The Dominican Republic is currently operating without radar redundancy for tracking inbound and outbound flights into Dominican airspace. The radar has been out of service for roughly six months and has suffered repeated breakdowns over the course of the past four years. The radar's failure is causing a financial burden to U.S. air carriers by extending flight times and has raised air safety concerns due to the air traffic controllers' use of a back-up manual radio relay system. On August 7, Post sent a letter to the Dominican Civil Aviation Institute (IDAC) expressing its concern and requesting a status report on IDAC's efforts to repair or replace the radar. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Andrew O'Brian, the operations manager for the private airport management company (Aerodom) for Santo Domingo's Las Americas Airport, recently complained to EconOff that the country's sole radar system is out of service. The Director of Air Navigation Services for IDAC, Santiago Rosa, told EconOff that IDAC is aware of the problem and working to fix the system. However, O'Brian stated that his company's efforts to get IDAC to repair or replace the radar system have been consistently unsuccessful and that IDAC has been very slow to respond to the problem. The radar design in question, which was manufactured by a French company, is reportedly no longer in production, thus making repairs particularly difficult to procure. At the moment the radar has been out of operation for approximately six months, but it has suffered repeated outages over the past four years.

Financial and Safety Impacts of Radar Inoperability

¶3. (SBU) According to the Country Director for American Airlines in the Dominican Republic, Rafael Sanchez, the lack of radar redundancy means that all American Airlines flights are being re-routed to one of their contingency routes in order to bring them into the country through the eastern part of the island. The eastern Punta Cana Airport, which is privately owned, purchased its own radar following continued problems with the country's sole radar at Las Americas Airport. The Dominican civil aviation authorities are therefore relying on this airport's private radar while it resolves its radar system problem. The consequence of this re-routing, however, is that all flights are taking approximately 13 to 15 minutes longer than necessary in the air. In addition to the inconvenience this causes to passengers, it is a growing financial burden for the airlines, according to Sanchez.

¶4. (SBU) Although there have not yet been any pilot safety reports filed indicating that the back-up manual radio relay system has presented a safety hazard, at least according to Continental and American Airlines Dominican representatives, O'Brian warned that a similar manual relay system has been a

contributing factor in previous airline safety incidents. O'Brian pointed to the potential for human error in having pilots report their positions via radio instead of relying on redundant radar systems to confirm locations, and noted that the spacing between aircraft has been expanded from 10 miles to 25 miles as a precaution.

Impact on Dominican Republic's Counternarcotics Efforts

15. (SBU) The radar system the Dominican Republic has currently serves both the civilian air traffic controllers and the military, although the information sharing arrangement between the two is unclear. As such, the radar's failure presents problems for the Dominican government's counternarcotics efforts and military operations. As reported in a story on the CNN website on July 11, the radar's inoperability is threatening the Dominican government's ability to track drug trafficking flights. Despite the announcement of the purchase of 8 SuperTucano turboprop interdiction aircraft from Brazil last month there seems to be very little urgency being placed on repairing or replacing the radar, which would allow the Dominican Republic to track these illicit flights and enable the new SuperTucanos to operate effectively and safely. However, even if the radar is restored to its full operability its outdated technology will still inhibit fully effective tracking of these illicit flights.

16. (SBU) Post expressed its concerns to IDAC in a letter dated August 7 from the Charge d'Affaires to the Director of IDAC, Dr. Norje Botello. Any substantive response will be reported septel.
BULLEN